

FT View

Look beyond the numbers

MOST issues in Sri Lanka seem to dwindle into a numbers game. In the latest chapter, it is keeping a tally of how many countries will or will not attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) rather than making a concentrated effort to promote Sri Lanka's reputation internationally.

Cabinet Spokesman Minister Keheliya Rambukwella was upbeat on Thursday that the number of confirmed attendees had reached 37. He argued that this exceeds the total number of countries that attended the Australian CHOGM in Perth and provided the number as evidence that Sri Lanka's reputation was still glowing despite the lack of commitment from India.

The Economic Development Ministry and Industry and Commerce Ministry over the past few weeks has been kept busy informing the media about the numbers that have been confirmed for the Commonwealth Business Forum (CBF) as well as the mega exhibition showcasing trade and investment opportunities in Sri Lanka.

These are undoubtedly important numbers and clearly spell the return that Sri Lanka will make from CHOGM. As officials spend willy-nilly on the summit with over Rs. 800 million allocated for the import of luxury cars along with over Rs. 700 million on tax concessions given to the same as well as a whopping Rs. 15 million allocated just for the media registration website it becomes even more important to reach the target of US\$ 2 billion investment targeted from the CBF.

Yet it cannot be denied that much of the return expected from CHOGM will be intangible. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's attendance is a case in point. It may not earn Sri Lanka billions in investment, but his participation together with a possible visit to the north will go a long way to assuring to the world that post-war reconciliation in Sri Lanka is a reality. It will also contribute to appeasing Sri Lanka's most vehement critics in South India as well as form a supportive platform, one can hope, for the hurdles the island will face come the UN Human Rights Council next March.

Impressing British Prime Minister David Cameron and New Zealand's Foreign Minister Murray McCully who have announced they will visit the former war-torn northern parts of Sri Lanka during the summit to ascertain firsthand the situation faced by tens of thousands of the Tamil population is also another opportunity for Sri Lanka to put its best foot forward and minimise the bad publicity garnered when Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper pulled out of the summit and announced a cut on funding made by his country to the Commonwealth Secretariat, citing Sri Lanka's poor human rights track record.

Given this situation, the detainment of two media freedom activists less than two weeks ahead of the summit as well as failing to emphasise clear long-term plans for its reconciliation process remains worrying. The leaps that have been made as CHOGM rolls closer have been landmark. The commission to investigate into disappearances, legal action taken against the killing of 12 NGO workers and five students in the east along with progress on the murder of a British tourist have all put Sri Lanka's reputation on a better footing.

Yet, there are no assurances that these progressive steps will continue after the CHOGM bandwagon has packed up and left town. That also means that the good impression the Government is so keen to create during the seven days of CHOGM and the massive investment the local taxpayer is making could all make poor returns.



The Canadian Security Intelligence Services. Sri Lanka does not have a legally binding intelligence agency along the lines of Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) or the Canadian Security Intelligence Services (CSIS)

National Strategic Intelligence Agency: A new reality for Sri Lanka

THE armed forces of Sri Lanka achieved a resounding victory over the LTTE, which many newspapers and scholars dubbed as the world's most ruthless terrorist organisation. This victory was truly a remarkable feat in anti-terrorism, which no other country could claim.

If not for the tenacity, resolve and the political leadership displayed by President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brother Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, we would still be living in a state of fear.

It was India's war and the whole of India must congratulate President Rajapaksa that he was able to neutralise the LTTE Air Wing which was a direct threat to Indian national security. If LTTE could operate an air strip in Sri Lanka, it could also have operated secret air services to and from Tamil Nadu for gun running. It would have had wider ramifications for India.

Genocide: The canard that needs to be exposed

The image of Sri Lanka is still being hammered all over the world through news media. The wild word 'genocide' is still being uttered all over the world media. It is surprising to note that even the most literate personalities have appeared on international media overseas and hammered Sri Lanka for carrying out a campaign of 'genocide' in Sri Lanka not knowing the real meaning of the word.

The Oxford Dictionary says that genocide means "deliberate and systematic destruction of an ethnic group". There is hardly any such evidence in Sri Lanka. The war victory has in fact brought the force of the Constitution of Sri Lanka, which guarantees the right to live, across the length and breadth of Sri Lanka. The word 'genocide' was an excellent propaganda gimmick for pro-separatists abroad.

It is regrettable to note that our diplomatic corps do not seem to have done much to deconstruct the word 'genocide'. As recently as a year back an Indian TV channel with very high ratings had a debate over whether Sri Lankan players should be barred from taking part in IPL and all the panellists, who were highly literate and some were from anti-Lanka lobby and others were moderates, were of the view that there is a 'genocide' in Sri Lanka. This demonstrates that the right picture of Sri Lanka has not been percolated to the Indian audience.

Rekindling the flame of democracy in the Northern peninsula

Now the much-awaited election of the Northern Provincial Council has successfully been concluded and the provincial government installed. The Rajapaksa administration has ensured that the flame of democracy is lit again in these areas, where for three decades people lived under an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. The LTTE has been decimated and its effectiveness has now been confined to the living remnants hiding in foreign countries.

The diplomatic offensive launched by the separatist lobby needs to be countered effectively. New diplomacy requires experts well-versed in the art of diplomacy (official diplomacy) and new public diplomacy (greater

interactions with wider public overseas) requires experts who should

seminate intelligence information is constantly monitored by the US

FT Quote

“The military campaign is now over and a new war on public diplomacy needs to be waged overseas. Besides, there has arisen a new role for intelligence organisations to focus on foreign intelligence and to assess the movements of the pro-separatist lobby both by means of covert and overt and this would entail the permanent presence of intelligence operatives in these countries. There is a need for urgent reforms within the national intelligence apparatus of Sri Lanka in order to meet this new threat and what lessons it could learn from experiences from other countries”

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Intelligence sharing and cooperation with other countries

There was greater cooperation among intelligence agencies of the US and Europe in the fight against Iraq and now against Taliban and Al-Qaeda. As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, there should be intelligence cooperation with the foreign government agencies. It is especially important to have closer cooperation

with the Government of India as the LTTE has been a common enemy for both countries and India too should keep the LTTE firmly under check.

Re-emergence of the LTTE once again would be a destabilising factor for the Union Government. India needs to redouble its funding for anti-LTTE operations worldwide in concert with the Government of Sri Lanka. It would be beneficial for the Government of Sri Lanka to have a joint mechanism for greater cooperation among the two countries on intelligence gathering and threat assessments. The diplomacy between the two governments was at an elevated state when the final war was being waged. This momentum must be continued.

Intelligence gathering is as important during wartime as in peace time. Lowering the guard cannot under any circumstances be justified. Sri Lanka does not have a legally binding intelligence agency along the lines of Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) or the Canadian Security Intelligence Services (CSIS). These organisations have been created by Acts of Parliament.

In the US, members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence have been given limited access to intelligence information and government ability to collect and dis-

seminate intelligence information is constantly monitored by the US Senate. This will keep the officials of the governments on their toes so that no manipulation of intelligence to serve the political masters can be attempted at. Even though parliaments vote money for intelligence agencies operations, actual details of the money expended is never let out to public in order to protect the sources of intelligence.

As far as the Sri Lankan context is considered, an agency exclusively for gathering intelligence must have the constitutional provision to report directly to the President, being the Commander-in-Chief/Minister of Defence, the Prime Minister and the Parliamentary Permanent Committee for Intelligence. The objectives of the National Strategic

Intelligence Agency are to gather, correlate, evaluate and analyse domestic and foreign intelligence, in order to identify any threat or potential threat to the security of the Republic or its people, and inform the President of any such threat and supply (where necessary) intelligence relating to any such threat to the respective Police and Defence Forces Commanders for appropriate action.

The Agency should be under the command of a Director General responsible for coordinating the functions of intelligence gathering and assessments in collaboration with other organs of the Government, viz Chief of Defence Staff, Armed Forces, Police, Customs, Coast Guard and Immigration, etc., in support of official policy.

His role is uniquely sensitive and a uniquely important role in the Government. He must support policy makers, but not become captive of the policymakers. The DG must ensure that the capabilities at his disposal are effectively utilised, but that they remain within the confines of law and bound by our national interests. The DG should be prepared to take risks, and yet be prudent and restrained in terms of both policy decisions and resource allocation. In short the DG demands an uncommon measure of judgment and discretion.

Rule of law and judicial scrutiny

The Constitution guarantees the rights of all citizens and respect

for human rights, as such judicial control over arrests, detention, invasions of privacy; wire tapping must be incorporated into to legislative framework where activities of intelligence agencies must be brought under. Since the war is over and it is now purely a defensive measure to monitor the activities of suspected individuals, it is important that electronic surveillance must be carried out with the full force of law and with the mandate of a Court of Law.

The US Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 (FISA) was a piece of legislation introduced by the then US Government to stem the infiltration of foreign intelligence agents in US and this law created a special FISA Court so that all actions of the US. Government agencies were within the bounds of law. It should be borne in mind that Sri Lanka is a party to the Convention on Civil and Political Rights and government should be cautious in its action as it could be interpreted as unconstitutional whatever the motives of the Government in apprehending terrorists or potential terrorists. Civil liberties of the people must not be stifled with for narrow political gains.

New political alignments

There has been a new political alignment to counter increase dominance of China. China has threatened Japan, a peaceful nation sympathetic towards Sri Lanka, and has been a key partner in our development initiatives long before China emerged as an ally of Sri Lanka. Japan has now woken up to see the real dragon on the move.

The Government of Japan has taken a series of measures to bring the Japan Self Defence Force in keeping with the real requirements to protect its vital sea lanes of communications. These are new strategic realisations and now Japan, India and the US have begun a new strategic trilateral partnership to counter the rising China. This would of course have wider ramifications for Sri Lanka as China too has ambitions in the Indian Ocean Region.

Sri Lanka now requires a balanced approach to the new world order and any tilt towards China would cause damage to our relationship with traditional allies. The emotional politics of Tamil Nadu would eternally cause troubles for Sri Lanka, hence cementing our relationship with the Central Government is of paramount importance and that would certainly dilute the Tamil Nadu influence. It would be difficult to predict the attitude of future governments towards Sri Lanka, however if a home-grown political solution is articulated it would be for our benefit rather than being dictated from overseas

(This writer is a freelance journalist and a political lobbying and public affairs consultant. He is also a member of the American Association of Political Consultants).



Wijeya Newspapers Ltd

No 41, W.A.D. Ramanayake Mawatha, Colombo 2.

Web: www.ft.lk Email: editor@ft.lk Email: news@ft.lk

General: 2479780, 2479479 News Desk: 2479781/82/85 Fax: 2447848

Advertising: 2479500, 2479561

Subscriptions: 2479626, 2479628, 2307789 Email: subs@wijeya.lk



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Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka

For further information contact:

96, Kirula Road, Colombo 5

Telephone: 5353635 Fax: 5335500

E-mail: pccsl@pccsl.lk

Web page: www.Pccsl.lk